Elizabeth Ezra (2017) *The Cinema of Things: Globalization and the Posthuman Object*, London: Bloomsbury, 208 pp.

Elizabeth Ezra's *The Cinema of Things: Globalization and the Posthuman Object* aims to uncover the ways in which globalisation and commodity culture have given rise to a "cinema of things" where objectification and prostheticisation of people have become commonplace. The book traces how lines between human and object as represented in cinema become blurred, starting with late nineteenth century French cinema and taking the reader all the way to the early twenty-first century Hollywood blockbuster. Its goal is to expose how cinema represents humans' increasing transformation into "objects", humans in desperate need of prosthetics (in the Heideggerian/Stieglerian sense of supplemental "virtual" extensions of the human body), accumulating and becoming part of a commodity culture that Ezra considers as key to globalisation – the process of becoming posthuman in the digital age. The book consists of five chapters that each outline different human-object relations: "Consuming Objects", "Exotic Objects", "Part-Objects", "Objects of Desire", and "Posthuman Objects". By exploring these relations, the book hopes to add to the understanding of how commodities take on a life of their own, engulfing and ultimately replacing the people that come into contact with them; how the human body is exploited as an object for entertainment, labour, or war; and how technology and artificial life's supplementation are challenging human-object boundaries. In its attempt at surveying these relationships, the book considers a very broad and diverse archive of cinematic works and an equally broad sense of "things" and "objects" themselves.

The first chapter, "Consuming Objects", focuses on the obsolescence of consumer capitalism and its privileged temporal mode of supplementarity through a case study of *Sex and the City 2* (Michael Patrick King, USA, 2010), *Bridesmaids* (Paul Feig, USA, 2011), and *The Help* (Tate Taylor, USA/India/UAE/UK/France/Canada/Germany, 2011). The recurring themes of consumption, fertility, and human waste in these films are read as reinforcing the notion that commodity culture relies on the exploitation of cheap labour, a practice that thrives on the commodification/objectification of human beings and bodies. The second part of this chapter focuses on Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Micmacs à tire-larigot/Micmacs* (France, 2009), and how this film presents a form of resistance to consumption culture that focuses on recycling and salvaging. It further explores how minorities in all these films are used as prosthetics, mere tools in a logic of substitution that forms the basis of globalisation.

"Exotic Objects" is primarily concerned with exoticism, or how human beings are reduced to instrumentalised, exotic objects of fascination and entertainment value. The chapter considers two key periods in the history of cinematic exoticism in France. For the first period, Ezra presents the reader with the cinematic oeuvre of African American Jazz Age icon and actor Josephine Baker. Ezra reads the lack of cultural specificity in the characters that Baker, as a woman of colour, portrayed in her work during the 1930s as indicative of exoticism, melting down geographic and historical specificities into an indistinct mass of "otherness". The second period considered by Ezra continues this line of thought and focuses on French New Wave cinema and how films such as Agnès Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7/Cleo from 5 to 7* (France/Italy, 1962), François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (France, 1962) and Alain Resnais' *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour/Muriel, or the Time of Return* (France/Italy, 1963) struggle with similar issues of exoticism, sexism, and representing blackness in relation to colonial wars.

Continuing along the lines of war and human objectification, the third chapter explores how people are reduced to part-objects as part of the process of abstraction that creates exchange value in consumption culture. The chapter focuses on the processes of disavowal of human differences and the logic of substitution in the context of the two biggest wars of the twentieth century and how these find their representation in French cinema history. Ezra opens with a close reading of Louis Feuillade's French silent film serial *Les Vampires* (France, 1915), which represents the physical horrors and the fetishistic logic of displacement of World War I through a metaphor of severed heads. This metaphor is shown to have roots in the public imagination of dismembering bodies in the late nineteenth century and functions to point out the logic of substitution of bodies in WWI. The focus of the chapter then shifts to the USA, looking at the Marx Brothers' *Big Store* (Charles Riesner, USA, 1941), which has similar veiled allusions to the human destruction in Europe, this time in the case of WWII. Ezra reads the film as illustrative of the reduction of people to part-objects not only in time of war, but also in time of "great mechanical faith" and globalisation (p. 117).

"Objects of Desire" focuses on the disavowal of sexual difference that lies at the heart of the fetishistic logic of dismemberment and substitution, or how heterosexual desire for women has dominated cultural production. As such, the logic of supplementarity that characterises globalisation, Ezra argues, is the same as the logic that underwrites the prostheticisation of women as objects of the male gaze/of desire. The chapter starts by looking at the shared history between the birth of cinema and the imagery of dissecting women in late nineteenth century

operation films, before Ezra charts a continuation of this imagery in French cinema, in particular during the 1960s in films like *Les Yeux sans visage/Eyes Without a Face* (Georges Franju, France/Italy, 1960), *Alphaville* (Jean-Luc Godard, France/Italy, 1965) and *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, France/Italy, 1968). Ezra also shows that the theme recurs in English science fiction films made by French directors – all products of the same patriarchal discourse in which women are transformed into objects of technological manipulation. The chapter then considers what happens if the object of desire itself becomes virtual and explores the implications for gender as a social construct when most virtual objects are gendered as female – as per *S1M0NE* (Andrew Niccol, USA, 2002) and *Her* (Spike Jonze, USA, 2013).

The final chapter of the book, "Posthuman Objects", fully moves in to posthuman territory and explores how technological creations have taken on lives of their own. For this purpose, the case studies include *Avatar* (James Cameron, USA, 2009), *Prometheus* (Ridley Scott, USA/UK, 2012), and *WALL·E* (Andrew Stanton, USA, 2008). *Avatar* is read as an allegory of post-global conquest and rebellion, with the storyworld of Pandora and its native Na'vi inhabitants seen as a digital utopia, where the distinction between the natural and the technological is as good as erased, thereby revealing the extremities of human prostheticisation. *Prometheus* and *WALL·E*, meanwhile, are read as staging a fusion of the human and the technological in their attribution of human characteristics to robots. Ezra argues that these three films all point towards how prostheses that originally were intended to extend and to enhance human capabilities have come to surpass, challenge and become interchangeable with humans themselves. In the process, they challenge the boundaries between human and object while also extending our vision of the world, suggesting that our consciousness is becoming equally globalised as the objects with which we interface, thus making us global subjects. As Ezra concludes: "[c]inema supplements us, showing us what we're missing" (p. 182).

The Cinema of Things draws out some surprising connections and offers a broad range and interesting new readings of certain (academically underexplored) cinematic objects, such as *Sex and the City 2* and the oeuvre of Josephine Baker, especially as seen in the light of and against the background of French colonialism. Still, this book ultimately falls short of its considerable promises. Indeed, at no moment does it put forward a clear sense of what a cinema of things looks like exactly, nor does it offer a consistent account of the connections between globalisation, posthumanism and the notion of the object. While most of the book's analyses are sharp and coherent, they lack a sense of theoretical

sophistication, and there is, for instance, never a clear definition of Ezra's understanding of an "object" or a "thing" – two quite different terms with different philosophical meanings and genealogies; for example, Bill Brown's thing theory (2001) is by no means the same as Graham Harman's speculative realism (2011). Furthermore, there is no mention of Timothy Morton (2013), Levi R. Bryant (2014) or Quentin Meillassoux (2008), nor of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (2005), whose work could have helped make this book's theoretical framework more robust. While *The Cinema of Things* does not actively inscribe itself in the environmental humanities, it is also surprising that it does not mention any work done by ecocinema scholars and theorists, such as Sean Cubitt (2005), Adrian Ivakhiv (2013), Stephen Rust (2013), and Paula Willoquet-Maricondi (2010), who have done significant work in pointing out the complex relationships between the human, the nonhuman and globalisation. As a result, the argument and development of the book are strangely self-enclosed and not systematically placed in dialogue with different vibrant research fields, even if such dialogue could have strengthened the case that the book wants to make considerably. *The Cinema of Things* is also conspicuously light on references to Marxist and economic perspectives, which is unexpected given its focus on commodity culture and globalisation. A further problematic is the split focus on France and the USA, which is not entirely well-motivated. Why not a consideration of Bollywood and the Chinese film industry? Or Japanese *anime*, where posthuman themes are rampant? Alas, then, *The Cinema of Things* is not the must-read book that it could have been, not least because it deals with such relevant, timely and complex issues as human-object relationships, society, culture and globalisation.

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